

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, December 25, 1891, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to her husband, Dr. Alexander Graham Bell Hotel de G?nes Christmas 1892 My darling Alec:

Your telegram with its message of love and Christmas Greetings was the first thing I knew this morning and a very pleasant "Goodmorning" it was. I am so glad the sheep are a success and hope that they will continue to do well. I can imagine you going up the mountain amid the snow and ice. I hope you are putting off some of your surplus weight and laying up a good store of health and strength. I do not dare to think much of Beinn Bhreagh — my courage fails when I do. Oh, my dear! we have been very happy there. I hardly know what chance there is of your ever receiving this, but hope that you will have at least this one letter from land to assure you that we are all well and doing well. Until the hotel bill comes in of course I cannot tell how we are doing as to expenses, but I do not think the people of a place like this would cheat us even if we are unprotected females. If Daisy only knew a little more French we should be all right as it is I think we have really managed very well. The children begin to understand a good deal of what is said to them even if they cannot reply. Daisy insisted on having a Christmas tree of her own — it was a poor pathetic little attempt, a tall laural branch set in our water pitcher. You were not here to object! and hung with half a dozen sour Mandarinis a few mottoes and a few presents of candy, boxes, etc. The Mandarinis were sour simply because there don't seem to be any sweet ones here. I think the good ones must be all shipped off to American — all except those we have in our basket which has lasted us until now and would have lasted us until tomorrow but that Daisy with what I thought unnecessary generosity gave Mrs. Goode our last two. We had Kenneth Goode in to share our tree and Mrs. Goode said it made him feel less homesick so our poor little tree answered its purpose. As I write the children are busy mending their clothes! I assure you this is a very novel sight. We are

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in fact doing so 2 well with only Charles to wait upon us that I shall not try to get a maid in Florence, but will put the money into things on teachers. I rather wonder what Charles thinks of it all. His only business is to trot around at our heels as we go wandering up and down the labyrinth of narrow streets. I should think they would be foul and ill smelling — so rarely can the sun penetrate through the high walls which bend forward as they go up, but I have found but one alley anything but sweet and pure and in that one the odor was of carbolic acid. In front of our hotel market is held every morning and it is a constant entertainment to watch from the hotel windows the crowd of market women in constant motion constantly changing and yet ever the same bright colored crowd. At ten A.M. precisely market is over the women pile their flat empty baskets one on the other, perch them on their heads and with stately step take their way homewards. The uniformed men come and briskly sweep up the sweet smelling debris and almost before the last woman has gone the piazza is swept as clean as if never a market had been held. Then the cabs which had been arranged up one side of the piazza take up their stand for the day in the middle and their places are occupied with fancy goods booths. Everything is done with such system and precision as is beautiful to see. Daisy has announced that she has had a “lovely time today” and that her tree “was almost the nicest she ever had.” I am perfectly astounded. Does it then really take so little to make a child happy? Of what use then the immense amount of money annually spent in Christmas tree decoration? May not the truth be that the lavish display is really for our own gratification and that the plea of giving pleasure to children is but a cloak to hide the truth. Well I am afraid I do enjoy a Christmas tree immensely myself. We had a very quiet day only going to High Mass in the morning and dressing the tree in the afternoon and writing letters, so I could not see the occasion for Daisy's enthusiasm, but she is a happy natured little thing and her bright face is my great comfort now. 3 Elsie is very much nicer and less trouble than I expected and she is enjoying herself as much as Daisy but she is not as much interested or so eager. We have had rain today which does not seem at all the proper thing and Mrs. Goode showed me tonight the account of the death by freezing of some one in town, but it does not seem to me so very cold. Still I do not want it any colder and I rather dread Florence. Daisy still

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coughs more and harder than I like but it does not seem to disturb her. She is very well otherwise and we are all regaining the appetites we left in Baddeck.

Uncle Richard's agent sent me a big bouquet of violets today — the biggest I ever had. I am decidedly afraid of him without ever having seen him. I delayed letting him know of my arrival until yesterday and now I wish I had let him alone for no other reason than that he is a Cavilliero and belongs to the Yacht Club and wrote that he would have given up his out of town Christmas engagement to escort me to midnight mass if he had known in time of my distinguished presence. The “distinguished” is my word not his, but that is how he makes me feel he regards me and I am so utterly unable to support the dignity without you. I have been reading an account of Father Assomotti the Italian de l'Epee and feel inclined to go and see the school. Shall I? I am afraid your reply will be rather out of date.

I have kissed my children Goodnight and wished them many more Merry Christmases. May others come to you and me too together my dear husband

As ever yours, Mabel